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ABSTRACT

The amount of time that should be spent on explicit teaching of language patterns and structure is an issue among second language teachers. Those who believe that language learning is a developmental process feel that there is no sense in teaching grammar and syntax explicitly since the learner can be expected to acquire these skills as he organizes the new linguistic system. On the other hand, those who believe that language learning is habit formation feel that first language habits carry over into the second language, and, therefore, the patterns of the new language must be drilled until they become habit. An analysis of syntactic errors made by children learning a second language provides knowledge about the processes involved in second language acquisition. Methodology used in the ESL (English as a second language) classroom should be based on an understanding of these learning processes. This paper discusses both theories of second language learning. The hypothesis that forms the framework for this study is that the child organizes the grammatical patterns of the second language by using language-learning strategies similar to those used by a first language learner. (Author/CLK)

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THE ENGLISH-AS-A-SECOND-LANGUAGE CHILD'S LEARNING OF GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

When children enter school at the age of five or six they have already "mastered" the phonological and grammatical systems of a language. They have done this with absolutely no formal training. The idea that languages are learned and not taught is worthy of consideration.

The environment in which young children acquire speech is not particularly conducive to language learning. Adults tend to simplify their speech when talking with young children. Also, there is no sequencing of structural items from simple to difficult in the verbal interaction between mother and child. Yet, the child is able to acquire the grammatical system of his native language. Furthermore, he does an excellent job of it.

It is equally amazing to see a child learn a second language. Somehow, a young child, just having mastered his native language, is still able to tackle successfully a second language. It is as though the language learning strategies he used in learning his first language are still available to him in the acquisition of a second language.

How children acquire the grammatical system of a second language is the focus of this study. Having "taught" English as a second language to children for four-and-a-

half years, it seemed an interesting and worthwhile topic for research.

In September, 1975, the Monroe Oral Language Test (English version) was administered to approximately 200 children in the kindergarten, first, and second grades at Littleton Elementary School in Cashion, Arizona. Each child, individually, was shown three pictures and encouraged to talk about the pictures. All of the responses were written down verbatim by the test administrator on a data sheet.

Each child was evaluated for oral language proficiency and scored according to guidelines. A child was placed in the Oral English Program, or not placed, dependent upon the score. In the process of evaluating the data, it became evident that certain types of errors occurred more frequently than others. Apparently, some constructions proved more difficult than others.

An analysis of syntactic errors provides knowledge about the processes involved in second language development. Is it a process of using native language structures in the second language? Is it a process of organizing the new linguistic system and making generalizations about it as was done in the acquisition of the first language?

A major weakness of the study exists in the procedure by which the errors were analyzed and classified. A systematic procedure for objectively identifying errors would lend more reliability to the conclusions that emerge

from this study. However, it was necessary at times to speculate considerably regarding the correct classification of the data.

Methods of teaching and theories of learning go hand in hand. Teachers, whether they are actively aware of it or not, establish certain notions about how children learn. A teacher develops classroom methods and techniques based on these theories, however broad or specific they may be. The methodology used by a teacher of English as a second language is the result of theories and ideas held by that teacher about the learning of a second language. Methodology is established consistent with theories.

Whether a lot of time should be spent on explicit teaching of language structure is an issue. Linguists do not appear to agree over this issue. There are those who believe that language is a formation of habits and that these habits transfer to a second language; therefore, the patterns of the new language must be drilled until they become a habit. This is the viewpoint of those who espouse the interference theory. Those who believe that language learning is a developmental process feel that there is no sense in teaching grammar and syntax explicitly since the learner can be expected to acquire it as he organizes the new system. This is the explanation given by the developmental theory, also known as the creative construction theory.

This study explores both beliefs. However, the following hypothesis is the framework for this study: The child organizes the grammatical patterns of the second language using language learning strategies similar to those used by a first language learner.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

There are various studies on first language learning that relate to second language learning. A number of researchers support the idea that second language acquisition is similar to first language acquisition. In order to better understand second language learning, it is necessary to gain an insight into language development in general.

Bloom (4) discusses how children learn to talk. Normally, just before the age of five, children speak and understand well-formed sentences. There is a sequence of steps through which children pass in order to achieve comprehension and production of well-formed sentences. Children employ individual strategies in acquiring language. The end result, however, is the same.

One theory about the development of language contends that children are remarkably similar to each other in language acquisition. Some linguists, including Chomsky, believe that children possess an innate language acquisition device. This biological endowment, they say, is responsible for the regularity of language development among children.

Yet, in Bloom's study, the three children involved employed different strategies. All three children were

learning the same language, but the manner in which their grammars emerged differed. This was to be expected given the fact that no two children are alike in cognitive ability and linguistic experience.

An analysis of children's errors gives an indication of strategies that are used in language learning. Consistency and constancy of errors is important. A child is learning language when his errors are systematic in nature. This reflects an effective organization of the language he hears.

Chastain (6) discusses the generative-transformational view of how language is acquired. In so doing, he discredits traditional ideas: 1) Few, approximately ten percent, of a child's utterances are imitations of adult speech. A child develops his own system of language patterns. 2) A child's awareness of patterns in language is more conducive to language acquisition than is repetition and practice. For example, the adding of -ed to form the past tense may be used by a child for irregular as well as regular verbs. 3) A child's acquisition of language is not accelerated by such external means as environment, reinforcement, etc. Rather, cognitive development is the factor that determines a child's learning rate. It is a part of the growing process that cannot be accelerated.

What, then, according to Chastain, is the process of learning a first language? First, the child makes one-

word utterances. A holophrastic sentence (one-word utterance) may convey a number of messages. The context in which the utterance is made provides the interpretation. Next, for the purpose of better communication, the child begins to use two-word utterances. There are two kinds of words in two-word utterances, pivot words and X-words. An X-word names and a pivot word gives the function. In the utterance "more milk", "more" is the pivot word and "milk" is the X-word. This is an elementary system of grammar that precedes adult speech. As the child matures in cognitive and linguistic ability he begins to make modifications and adjustments in structure that conform to adult speech.

According to one researcher, studies on children's syntax learning have given much attention to form and little attention to function. Form is the arrangement of words in utterances. Function is the meaning behind the words. These studies have demonstrated that young children use rules of grammar in simple two-word utterances. Yet, the utterances have been analyzed in terms of form and not function. Bloom (3) inquires into the significance of function in the study of children's acquisition of syntax.

Along with the analysis of form goes an analysis of word distribution and word cooccurrence. Words may be classified under one of two categories--pivots and X-words. Classification of a word depends upon its position,

distribution, and cooccurrence in utterances. However, even though these three aspects of words are taken into consideration, still the analysis is superficial. Function, i.e. context, must also be considered.

Language has surface structure and underlying structure. If we look only at the surface of a sentence we do not see the total picture. The syntactic value is lost if we do not look beyond form, distribution, and cooccurrence. Furthermore, ambiguity can result. If a child says, "no dolly", is she (he) saying that there is no doll or that she does not want a doll? Given the situation that motivated the child to say "no dolly", one can conclude what the linguistic function is of the word "no".

We are aware that a child understands more than he speaks. It is also likely that a child has a keener sense of structure than we credit to him. In Bloom's study, one of the children demonstrated an awareness of structure beyond that which she was able to produce in her speech. The child's use of "no" in "no pocket" and "no dirty soap" had the same surface structure, but the semantic interpretation of "no" was different in each utterance. The situations warranted a semantically different "no" in each utterance and the child was aware of the distinction.

An analysis of the distribution of words in an utterance, along with an interpretation of the message being conveyed, gives a deeper insight into the process of lan-

guage learning. Both form and function should be given attention when studying children's acquisition of syntax. Otherwise, the analysis is not complete.

According to Ervin-Tripp (10), the best language learner one can find is a young child. A child is able to absorb a language if the situation is natural and without strain. However, this is not to say that the child is merely a passive participant in the acquisition of language. He actively sorts out the language to which he is exposed and makes generalizations about it. The learning of syntax in children begins with the development of processing strategies. These strategies allow the child to formulate rules about the language he hears. He uses these rules in the production of language. Clearly, goofs are inevitable.

The word order rule is one of the earliest used and this results in missing functors and missing transformations. Here is an example: "Daddy dog". Other rules are formulated by the child in the beginning stages of syntax development. These are based on basic semantic relations such as negation, conjunction, agent-action, action-object, possession, etc. As the child produces language he uses general rules of construction and gradually he adjusts these rules in order to correct his sentence structure. So, he is not just learning words and phrases; he is also learning general rules of construction. Making errors is a necessary phase.

Berko (2) examined children's knowledge of morphological rules. The following areas were chosen for examination: Plurals, possessives, comparatives, superlatives, progressive tense, past tense, and the third person singular of verbs. The subjects were preschool and first grade children ranging from four to seven years of age. They were shown a picture, introduced to a nonsense word, and given the task of supplying the inflexion. Nonsense words were used in order to test the children's application of rules of morphology. Familiar words would only test the children's memory of known vocabulary.

The results showed that young children are conscious of rules of construction. Furthermore, they apply these rules with consistency. True, errors occur. However, the kinds of errors that are produced are the result of consistency, regularity, and simplicity in the application of rules. So, these errors only reinforce the belief that children possess a sense of structure and the ability to apply that sense. Children produce incorrect constructions because they apply regular inflexions, for example, to words that require irregular inflexions. Young children, in a developmental stage of language learning, learn by a process of organizing, generalizing, and simplifying the speech they hear. Errors are inevitable. The emphasis at this point is on communication, not form.

When we are speaking or listening to a speaker we focus our attention on the message. We, as speakers or

listeners, concern ourselves with the idea that we are trying to get across or that someone else is trying to get across. We do not preoccupy ourselves so much with the mechanics, i.e. syntactic patterns. Children learning language operate in the same manner. Their primary attention is focused on communicating their needs. The mechanics, i.e. grammar, necessary is of secondary importance.

Verbal interaction between the mother and child is not particulary conducive to the learning of structure. Adults simplify their speech when talking with young children. Furthermore, there is no sequencing of structural items from simple to difficult. The child hears and produces language, irregardless of facility or lack of facility with syntactic patterns.

This brings us to the first paradox that Cazden (5) discusses. While neither the adult nor the child are overtly concerned with the learning of structure, the child is able to acquire it. By the time the child enters school at the age of five or six he has "mastered" his native language. Cazden argues that a child's effective use of language depends on aspects (functions) of language use rather than on the child's grammatical ability. In other words, a variety of situations in which the child must communicate and function, do more to help the child develop language facility.

There is a second paradox to which Cazden addresses himself. Language acquisition vs. language education. If

children acquire syntax with ease in natural situations and functions, then it follows that language development programs should pattern themselves accordingly. However, it seems that such programs have not obtained long-term results. Three reasons are pointed out: 1) The teacher is less familiar with the children than the mothers; 2) The teacher must divide her attention among several children; 3) The teacher provides a larger variety of interactional settings. Therefore, although the educational environment may be patterned after the home environment, there are differences that cannot be resolved.

The following question arises: Should the home environment be simulated in school programs or should the approach be didactive? A certain advantage of the didactive program is the more equal distribution of teacher attention. The "natural" approach relies more on the child being stimulated to talk by talk-provoking situations. This means that some children that are introverts by nature will benefit minimally in this kind of program. However, all things considered, children develop language best when motivated by a strong desire to communicate. Therefore, Cazden suggests, the "natural" approach should be implemented as effectively as is possible for maximum results.

On the contrary, Chastain (6) does not advocate the use of classroom procedures for second language learning that are based on first language learning. He does en-

courage language teachers to study first language learning theories. However, because the circumstances are different between first and second language learning, the learning processes are also different. The following conditions are true of the second language learner and do not describe the first language learner: 1) The learner is not in a language environment where he is totally surrounded by the target language. 2) The learner, in all likelihood, is not stimulated by a strong desire to communicate in the target language. 3) The learner already knows another language. 4) The learner is more familiar with the world around him. 5) The learner is under pressure, to some degree, to acquire the language.

Many studies deal with the acquisition of a second language as it compares with the acquisition of a first language. Asher (1) contends that a heavy emphasis on developing the listening skill is a good learning strategy. There are three elements involved that relate to the way children learn their first language. First of all, the listening skill develops far in advance of the speaking skill. Second, children acquire listening ability usually through commands from adults. This means that body movement is involved on the child's part. Third, the listening phase is a preparation or "readiness" for speaking. Children begin to speak when they are ready.

An experimental study was conducted to test the theory that in order to learn a second language the learning

strategy must be in tune with first language learning strategy. In this case, the learning strategy was tied to the three elements mentioned above. The experimental group was given 32 hours of training. The first 16 hours consisted of listening to commands from the instructor. The students acted out the orders. The remaining 16 hours consisted of some speaking of commands by the students, but the emphasis was still on listening training.

In a comparison of the experimental group with two control groups the results showed that the above strategy accelerated greatly the development of listening skill. The students were ready to begin speaking much sooner than is normally expected.

It is true that in the learning of a language, first or second, listening is the first skill that is acquired. When the learner has developed enough listening ability, he begins to reproduce the language in another form--speaking. The learner makes this transfer when he is ready, that is, when he has acquired sufficient listening vocabulary and structure. If the listening phase is accelerated, then the speaking stage will begin sooner.

Ervin-Tripp (9) points out the significance of the setting in which a child learns a first language or a second language. A first language is learned in a natural setting and focus is on communication. The learning of a second language, however, does not usually take

place in a natural setting, and, the focus is on structure rather than on communication. Evidence of this is reflected in the research on second language learning which pays primary attention to manipulation of structure.

Thirty-one English-speaking children, ranging in age from four to nine, participated in a study of second-language learning in a natural environment. French was the target language. The children, enrolled by their parents in French-speaking schools, in Geneva, Switzerland, heard French most of the day. None of them had been exposed to French for more than nine months when they were tested for syntax and morphology.

Three statements can be made about the results of the above study: 1) Second-language learners acquire best those utterances that they can interpret and use. For, example, after just a few weeks of exposure to English, a young Spanish-speaker might use, with full comprehension, such speech as "stop it", "get out", "come here", "what's that". Functional items are useful, and, therefore, easier to remember. 2) Second-language learners simplify the structure of the target language. Most of the children in this study used the feminine article "la" and the masculine article "le" interchangeably. No distinction was made perhaps because both forms function in the same manner. 3) Second-language learners acquire a sense of rules for structural items that are easy to memorize. Word order is relatively simple.

All three statements given apply to first language development. The processing strategies employed are similar. When errors made by second language learners are analyzed, they are found to be very similar in pattern to the errors made by first language learners.

Ervin-Tripp argues against the idea that there is a fundamental difference between first and second language learning. A child learning a second language goes through the same language learning processes as does the first language learner. True, the second language learner has acquired more advanced skills and tactics since the learning of his first language; being older, he has gained more semantic and linguistic maturity. However, the first language learner also develops skills and tactics that enable him to make some sense out of the structural system presented to him. Yet research differentiates the two learning processes because of a difference in learning environment.

There is some disagreement between Riegel (12) and Ervin-Tripp regarding the effect of the learning environment on second language acquisition. One study deals with child learners and the other deals with adult learners. Riegel conducted a study on language learning involving adult college students. The subjects were twenty-four native speakers of English learning Spanish and twenty-four native speakers of Spanish learning English. Riegel concluded that "...in conceptual clarity the Spanish of

American subjects resembles closely the English of American college students, whereas the English of Spanish subjects corresponds more closely to that of American 6th graders".

Riegel does point out the learning environment as a factor that would influence the conclusion. The English learners of Spanish had formal classroom training, whereas the Spanish learners of English acquired fluency through real-life situations in an English-speaking environment. Riegel suggests that there is an implication here for methodology in second language development. It appears that formal training develops semantic structure, whereas informal training develops vocabulary and fluency.

Ervin-Tripp, however, believes that formal instruction emphasizes structure minus conceptual or semantic relations. Repetition in the form of dull and boring drills is not conducive to learning. Practice of structural patterns must take place in meaningful contexts. Children, as well as adults, learn and retain those syntactic structures that they can understand semantically and conceptually.

Valette (14) studied the acquisition of French by her three-year-old son. The child heard only French daily from nine to five in a nursery-school situation. At home he heard English. After a nine-month period the child developed authentic French pronunciation, and rapid growth in vocabulary and grammatical patterns.

Valette does not feel that substantial progress was made, given the fact that the learning environment was ideal. The child was immersed in a totally French environment where he could develop vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar in a completely natural situation. There were no controls or formal instruction of any kind to hamper the child's assimilation of the language.

After nine months the child had the language proficiency, in a second language, of a three-year-old native speaker. The child merits credit in view of the fact that he maintained his native language at home. It is true that in a natural and non-academic environment a child can be expected to "master" a language in a relatively short period of time. However, there are other factors that need to be considered. Does the child hear a different language at home? Are the systems (phonological, syntactical, etc.) of his native and target languages extraordinarily different? Does the child enjoy the world of his second language? These, and other questions, must be answered when a child's progress and proficiency in a second language are evaluated.

Other studies that compare first and second language learning do so in terms of two opposing theories--the creative construction theory and the habit formation theory. The creative construction theory proposes that children learn the grammar system of a second language through a process of organizing, generalizing, and simplifying the

structure and form. On the other hand, the habit formation theory proposes that children learn a second language using their native language as a base for the transfer of structure and form.

Dulay and Burt (8) analyzed syntactical errors made by children learning a second language. The focus was on how children acquire the syntactical system of a second language. Is it a developmental process (creative construction theory) or is it an interference process (habit formation theory)?

When a child uses native language structure in second language speech, his native language is interfering. This can be a positive as well as a negative transfer of native language patterns. More often, however, it is seen as a negative interference. When, for any given syntactical construction, the structure of the native language does not match with the structure of the second language, an error in syntax will occur. This is the contention of the habit formation theory, also known as the contrastive analysis hypothesis.

The creative construction theory contends that a child acquires the syntactical system of a second language by using the same language learning strategies he used in acquiring his first language. It is a developmental process; the errors that result are similar to the errors made by children learning a first language.

Burt and Dulay cite studies by Kinzel, Valette, Milon, Ravem, Natalicio and Natalicio on second language speech of children. The evidence shows that although some errors are accounted for by the contrastive analysis hypothesis, the majority of the errors are due to a developmental process.

A similar conclusion was drawn by Dulay's and Burt's own analysis of errors. The data was the speech of Spanish-speaking children and one Norwegian-speaking child learning English as a second language. Four kinds of errors were classified: Interference, developmental, unique, and ambiguous. More errors, a substantial number, were of a developmental nature.

Another study by Dulay and Burt (7) also tested the two opposing theories of second language learning. They classified and analyzed 513 errors in the speech of children, ages five through eight, learning English as a second language. The errors were classified as developmental, interference, or unique. Only 4.7% of the errors were in the interference category. 87.1% were in the developmental category. These errors were similar in form to the errors made by first language learners. This study contends that second language learning, in children at least, involves the use of learning strategies that are similar to those strategies employed by first language learners. First language learners also learn by a process of organizing, generalizing, and simplifying.

Attention must be focused on the implications of the creative construction theory as a viable explanation and description of second language learning. Afterall, methods of instruction are based on approach, and approach evolves from theory or theories held by the instructor. Therefore, if it is true that children learn a second language by the developmental and creative process, then, it may not be necessary to spend a lot of time on structure and form.

Natalicio and Natalicio (11) conducted a study in which they compared English pluralization by both native and non-native speakers of English. The subjects were 144 males from the first, second, third, and tenth grades. They were given a list of nonsense nouns to which they were to add plural endings. The results showed that both native and non-native speakers acquire the three allomorphs in the same order---s, -z, and -iz. A comparison of the overall performance showed that the native speakers were ahead of the non-native speakers to begin with in the first grade. Furthermore, they not only maintained that margin but widened it considerably by the time they reached tenth grade.

That the native speakers performed better than the non-native speakers in the first grade is understandable due to the latter group's late start in English. However, the significant difference in performance by the tenth grade should be considered seriously. Natalicio and

Natalicio cite three factors that may contribute to such a disparity. First of all, if Spanish is spoken in the home, English grammar is not developed outside of school. Second, if non-native speakers are given oral language instruction in the primary grades only, it is not enough time in which to master English grammar. Third, if the language teacher is overly concerned with first language interference, there is a stifling of normal language development.

Excessive concern with the native language in the second language classroom is open to question. Too much structure is the result. Second language learners, especially children, benefit from language practice that is meaningful to them. Language learning activities that are based on native language interference are, in all likelihood, not meaningful.

The contrastive analysis hypothesis is of special interest to linguists, as language teachers and as writers of language-teaching materials. The practicality of its use is being questioned, however, due to arising problems.

Wardaugh (15) defines the two versions of the interference theory as follows. The strong version of the hypothesis states that by contrasting one language system with another, that is, the grammar, phonology, and lexicon, it is possible to predict and describe the difficulties that will be encountered by the language learner.

Although most writers of contrastive analysis base their work on the strong version, few can meet the demands required by the theory. The weak version, on the other hand, is not as involved with grammar, phonology, and lexicon. Reference is made to the two systems only to explain the similarities and differences between the languages when linguistic interference is evident.

It is felt that the many uncertainties affecting contrastive linguistics stem from inadequacies in theory and practice. The weak version is accepted more readily than the strong version; however, contrastive analysis in general will probably play a lesser role in the future.

Language teachers, undoubtedly, are more willing to accept the weak version of the contrastive analysis hypothesis. There are relatively many dissimilarities between a learner's native and target languages. Why focus a lot of attention on patterns that are "supposed" to be difficult due to native language interference. A learner's native language will not interfere with his learning of the second language at every point where the languages do not match. It should not be necessary to practice, as a problematic item, every problem that is anticipated.

The significance of the strong version of the contrastive analysis hypothesis becomes apparent in Schachter's (13) investigation of the two interpretations. The apriori, which is also called the strong or predictive version, predicts difficulties that the second language learner will

encounter due to dissimilarities between the native and target languages. The aposteriori, which is also called the weak or explanatory version, deals with difficulties after errors occur. Recurring errors are analyzed in order to discover why they occur.

Schachter tested the two versions in a study involving Persian, Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese students' ability to form relative clauses in English. The apriori version predicted problems for the Chinese and Japanese students due to the dissimilarities between their native languages and English in terms of relative clause formation. Fewer problems were predicted for the Arabic and Persian students due to the similarities between their native languages and English in terms of relative clause formation.

The opposite of what was expected occurred. The Arabic and Persian students made more errors in relative clause formation than did the Japanese and Chinese students. If at this point the aposteriori version is applied the conclusion follows that Arabic and Persian students have more difficulties with English relative clause formation than do the Japanese and Chinese students. However, having previously predicted a different outcome, a closer look at the number of errors and the kinds of errors is warranted. The Japanese and Chinese students made less errors in RCF because they avoided the construction of relative clauses. In turn, the Arabic

and Persian students, finding RCF in English similar to RCF in their native languages, used relative clauses freely. Consequently, errors in RCF did not surface where they were expected, and did surface where they were not expected.

The explanatory version proved unreliable; based on production, it does not allow for the avoidance phenomenon. The predictive version, along with error analysis, and comprehension testing would provide the insight needed to better understand the process of second language learning.

Thus go the arguments in favor and against the two major theories of second language learning. Most current studies seem to support the developmental theory. Whether the student is adding inflexional endings, or forming relative clauses, he appears to be going through the same processes that he used in the acquisition of his first language. He is organizing, generalizing, and simplifying a system of utterances in order to reproduce them effectively. There is evidence that the student makes errors in syntax and grammar that can be attributed to first language interference. However, only a small portion of second language errors reflect first language structure. Therefore, there does not seem to be enough evidence to substantially confirm the interference theory.

Chapter 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

During the month of September, 1975, approximately 200 children in the kindergarten, first, and second grades were given the Monroe Oral Language Test at Littleton Elementary School. Littleton is located in Cashion, Arizona, an agricultural community west of Phoenix. Approximately 65% of the student enrollment is Mexican American. For the most part these are children for whom English is a second language.

The Monroe Oral Language Test is an informal method for evaluating children's oral language proficiency. It is used at Littleton to screen all children that are referred to the Oral English Program. It takes 10 to 15 minutes to administer and grade. Time is allowed for incidental conversation between the test administrator and the child, especially if the child feels frightened or ill-at-ease.

Each child individually was shown three pictures in which two or more characters are engaged in interesting activity. Note, a child would not necessarily respond to colorful, three-dimensional pictures, e.i. magazine pictures, especially those in which the characters are engaged in activities to which the child cannot relate. If the child is unable, for reasons of economic and social back-

ground, to identify with the characters and activities, he may not be stimulated to talk. Therefore, black and white, cartoon-type pictures in which the characters are involved in common, ordinary, yet interesting activities were chosen in order to avoid, as much as possible, biased instrumentation.

The child was encouraged to talk about the pictures. Except for initial encouragement, there was no prompting. A recorder was not used to tape the students' responses. Confusion would arise concerning the transcription of words that are indistinguishable on tape. For example, the prepositions in and on sound similar on tape. Furthermore, prepositions, in general, present difficulties for Spanish-speakers. Therefore, it was imperative to this study that there be no uncertainty as to the reliability of the responses on the data sheets. All of the responses were written down verbatim by the test administrator on a data sheet.

Of the total number tested, fifty-three data sheets were selected to be used in this study. Selection of data sheets was based on the number of syntactic errors per sheet. Those students producing the most "goofs" were selected. Our subjects can be described as kindergarten, first, and second grade boys and girls for whom Spanish is the native language and English is the target language.

Errors were extracted from the data sheets and listed under grade headings. There was no specific reason for

grade classification. An expansion of the study, however, could utilize such information. Errors were classified according to the following categories: Developmental, interference, ambiguous, and unique. Ambiguous errors that support both theories of second language learning were discarded. Unique errors that support neither theory were discarded also. A frequency count was taken of the kinds of errors under each classification—developmental and interference.

Chapter 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

A total of 133 errors were identified. Ambiguous errors that support both theories of second language learning were discarded. Unique errors that support neither theory were discarded, also. Thus, a total of 89 errors remained to be classified. 28.1% were classified as interference errors. 71.9% were classified as developmental errors.

TABLE 1

Summary of Errors

Grade	Number of children	Interference	Developmental
K	25	14	37
1	12	6	15
2	16	5	12
Total	53	25 (28.1%)	64 (71.9%)

It is interesting to note the proportional relation of interference errors to developmental errors between grade levels. Kindergarten children made a total of 51 errors, 27.5% interference and 72.5% developmental. First grade

children made a total of 21 errors of which 28.6% were interference and 71.4% were developmental. Second graders totaled 17 errors, 29.4% interference and 70.6% developmental. Note the significant amount of regularity in the ratio of interference errors to developmental errors between grade levels. Furthermore, there is a noteworthy trend in the variation of ratios with respect to grade levels. Kindergarten children registered the highest percentage of developmental errors. Second graders registered the highest percentage of interference errors. First graders fell in the middle position on both developmental and interference errors.

Perhaps age is a factor that determines, to some extent, what language learning processes the learner will use in the acquisition of a second language. The younger learner may be inclined to proceed as he did in the acquisition of his first language, actively organizing the new language as a new linguistic system. On the other hand, the older learner, by virtue of being older, may be more conscious of his native language and may tend to use native language structures in the second language.

A sub-classification of errors under the two major categories, developmental and interference, gives an idea of the frequency of certain types. Table 2 shows the types of errors that occurred most often.

TABLE 2

Types of Errors

Type	Error	Frequency
(Interference)		
Incorrect choice of preposition due to lack of distinction in Spanish between English *in* and *on*.	He's sitting *in* the ball.	18
(Developmental)		
Lack of tensing	He *take* the dog.	21
Lack of auxiliary verb *be*	He__trying to put the bird inside.	23
Overuse of auxiliary verb *be*	The little boy *is* wants to throw the ball.	5

A look at Table 2 show that 18 of the 25 interference errors were of one kind--incorrect choice of preposition. This accounted for almost all the errors that were listed under interference. Therefore, 72% of our interference errors were the result of one test picture showing a boy sitting on a ball, and another test picture showing two apples on a table. A substitution, on the child's part, of *in* for *on* increased substantially the total number of interference errors. In Spanish *en* is the equivalent of English *in* and *on*. The lack of distinction in Spanish causes confusion regarding the use of *in* versus *on* in English.

Two kinds of errors listed as developmental stand out noticeably--lack of tensing and lack of the auxiliary verb be. They account for 69% of the developmental errors. These are typical errors in the speech of young children who are acquiring English as a first language.

There were considerably more developmental than interference errors. Furthermore, the fact remains that 33 errors were discarded because they were ambiguous. They were identified as being either developmental or interference. If all of the ambiguous errors were classified under interference there would still be less errors in this category.

Ambiguous errors, however, cannot be justifiably classified without sufficient evidence. A discussion of the facts must be based on the data available. A major weakness of the study exists in the procedure by which the errors were analyzed and classified. A systematic procedure for objectively identifying errors would lend more reliability to the interpretation of the facts. However, it was necessary at times to speculate considerably regarding the correct classification of the data.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

How children acquire the syntax of a second language was the problem dealt with in this study. Is it a process of using native language structures in the second language? Is it a process of organizing the new linguistic system and making generalizations about its construction? The former explanation is accepted by those who espouse the interference theory. The latter is the viewpoint of those who espouse the developmental theory.

Research by Bloom, Chastain, Ervin-Tripp, and Berko in the area of first language learning reveals that young children possess a knowledge of structure and the ability to apply that knowledge in the acquisition of their native language. Cazden, Asher, Ervin-Tripp, Riegel, and Valette discuss the processes involved in first and second language learning. Learning environment is cited as a factor that affects the two learning processes. The first language is learned in a natural setting and the focus is on communication. The acquisition of a second language, however, does not usually take place in a natural setting, and the focus is on structure rather than on communication. Yet, an analysis of children's errors shows that the processing strate-

gies employed by first and second language learners are similar.

Fifty-three children at Littleton Elementary School in Cashion, Arizona, were selected to participate in this study. The subjects may be described as kindergarten, first, and second grade boys and girls for whom Spanish is the native language. Oral English proficiency was tested using the Monroe Oral Language Test. Syntactic errors were analyzed and classified according to two categories, developmental and interference.

28.1% of the errors were identified as interference errors. 71.9% were identified as developmental errors. Incorrect choice of preposition accounted for a large percentage of the interference errors. Lack of tensing and lack of the auxiliary verb be stand out in the developmental category.

The ratio of interference errors to developmental errors between grade levels was significantly similar: Kindergarten, 1:2.6; first grade, 1:2.5; second grade, 1:2.4. A noteworthy trend in the variation of ratios resulted. Kindergarten children registered the least amount of interference errors and second graders totaled the most. Perhaps it is an indication that age determines, to some extent, what learning processes the student will use in the acquisition of a second language.

Methodology used in the classroom is based on an understanding of the learning processes involved in the

acquisition of a particular skill. Theories of second language learning are concerned with the learning processes involved in second language acquisition. This study supports the developmental theory: a process of organizing, generalizing, and simplifying the second language using learning strategies similar to those used by first language learners.

Children, unlike adults, are highly receptive to new patterns of speech. They are not actively aware of rules of grammar and, therefore, are not hampered by them. True, they develop language learning strategies and employ general rules of construction. However, they do this in much the same way that the first language learner does. So, it is not a matter of transferring first language habits, e.i. patterns, to a second language; it is a matter of developing new habits based on new forms. The notion that first language grammatical patterns interfere with the learning of second language structure is probably more applicable to adults. Adults, being more conscious of native language structure, would be more apt to transfer structural elements of their native language.

Children are motivated by a strong desire to communicate. In the natural environment primary attention is focused on communication. The mechanics, e.i. grammar, is of secondary importance. The home environment, thus, can serve as a model for language development programs. Grammar and syntax need not be taught explicitly

as it will be acquired by the learner as he organizes the grammatical patterns of the new language.

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APPENDIX

VERBATIM RESPONSES

INTERFERENCE ERRORS

1. He's sitting down in the ball.
2. Sits in the ball.
3. That one is sitting in the basketball.
4. They want see the book.
5. He don't know to do it.
6. He's sitting in the basketball.
7. Picking his legs.
8. The girl open the cage from the bird.
9. The boy sitting in top of the ball.
10. The boy eating apple.
11. The boy is sitting down in a ball.
12. The boy is sitting in the ball.
13. She sitting in the ball.
14. He's holding the string from the dog.
15. A boy's sitting down in the ball.
16. The boy is sitting in the ball.
17. The boy is sitting in the ball.
18. The boy is sitting in the ball.
19. The kid is sitting in the basketball.
20. The boy is sitting in a ball.
21. There is some apples in the table.
22. Him is sitting in the ball.
23. The boy is sitting down in the ball.
24. There's some books in the desk.
25. And that dog is looking to that boy.

DEVELOPMENTAL ERRORS

1. There's a girl running fast as she can.
2. When he finish the apple he went to play.
3. They eating apple.
4. They was playing.
5. The boy giving a apple to the little girl.
6. The little boy want to throw the apple.
7. The girl open the cage and the little birdie fly out.
8. A girl bring a wagon.
9. The bird skip away.
10. The boy's open the door.
11. The boy give a apple to the girl.
12. They eating apple and reading.
13. The little boy have the dog.
14. The little bird flied away.
15. The little boy is open the door.
16. He is tired bouncing the ball.
17. She open the door for the bird could fly away.
18. They was laughing.
19. She is going to closed the cage.
20. The dog want a apple.

21. The little girl taking the wagon.
22. The bird fly away.
23. He take the dog.
24. He trying to put the bird inside there.
25. The girl eating apple.
26. The boy and the girl pushing the wagon.
27. That boy playing with baseball.
28. He fly.
29. Two riding a little car.
30. The little boy is want to throw the apple.
31. The little pidgeon want to fly out.
32. This boy playing with the ball.
33. A boy sit down on the ball.
34. This the father.
35. Right here a dog.
36. He holding the dog.
37. The bird flying.
38. She got that.
39. The boy riding the wagon.
40. She holding a puppy.
41. She get the car.
42. A boy sitting on ball.
43. The man and the mother is eating apple.
44. He's open the door.
45. The girl open the cage from the bird.
46. A bird flying out his cage.
47. He have a ball.
48. The boy gonna give her the girl a pineapple.
49. He write something on his hand.
50. She eating a apple.
51. He gaving the apple to her.
52. The boy sitting in top of the ball.
53. The boy eating apple.
54. The boy is open the door.
55. She eating donuts.
56. The boy haves the ball.
57. The orange is all bited and he give it to the girl.
58. The girl want the apple.
59. The little bird fly away.
60. The boy and the girl is pushing the wagons.

AMBIGUOUS ERRORS

1. He's eating apple.
2. There's two apples.
3. There's two apple left.
4. There's two apples right there.
5. Here's some books.
6. The boy is sad because he don't have no apples.
7. There's three books right here.
8. Thereissome apples in the table
9. Them are eating an apple.
10. Him giving the apple to her.

11. Him got the dog.
12. Them pushing the wagons.
13. Him eating an apple.
14. Her eating an apple.
15. Her is running.
16. She open the door for the bird could fly away.
17. It not run away.
18. Her is running.
19. Her and him are going to play with the wagons.
20. There's some book in the desk.
21. There is three books.
22. There is two apples on the table.
23. He going to hit her with a car.
24. There two balls.
25. Her's eating a apple.
26. The man and the mother is eating apple.
27. The boy and the girl eating apple.
28. They eating apple.
29. They eating apple and reading.
30. There's two orange.
31. There's two apple left and one book.
32. They have some orange.
33. They have two orange.

UNIQUE ERRORS

1.
2. One boy's playing a ball.
3. The nother girl is eating the apple, too.
4. The little boy is sitting the ball.
5. The nother boy is pushing.
6. The girl let the bird away.
7. They are two apples on the table.
8. The boy's sitting at the ball.
9. This three of the book.
10. They are three books.
11. A girl is going get a apple.
12. The nother little girl biting a apple.
13. They want to eat the nother apples.